Rancher, pilot deny smuggling charge

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A Texas banker-rancher and a commercial airline pilot from Baton Rouge, La., say they are innocent of charges of conspiring to transmit munitions to Mexico.

Richmond Harper of Eagle Pass, Tex., said in Texas Monday, "It's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of."

Adler, H. Seal, who has been a pilot with Trans World Airlines, said in New Orleans where he was released on a $50,000 personal recognizance bond, "I haven't done a thing. That's what you're going to find out."

They were among nine persons arrested Saturday night in Louisiana and Texas on the conspiracy charges. The federal government alleged that they were in a $465,000 scheme to smuggle plastic explosives and other accessories to Mexico for use to transship to another country.

Federal officials alleged the munitions were to be used in a plot to overthrow a foreign government, presumably in Cuba.

The only one of the nine who remained in jail Tuesday was Murray Kessler of Brooklyn, N.Y., identified in the complaint as the man who made the arrangements for the sale to a person identified only as "Carlos Diaz." Kessler was held in New Orleans in lieu of $100,000 bond.

Diaz was identified by the federal government only as claiming to be a citizen of Mexico. Officials said they were looking for him.

Federal authorities Monday said there were links between Kessler and a Mannie Gambino, a member of an alleged New York organized crime family.

Michael Pollack of a Justice Department organized crime strike force in Brooklyn said in New Orleans that Kessler was a partner with Gambino in Neptune Nuggets, a Long Island, N.Y., frozen food packaging firm.

Gambino, 29, has not been reported seen since late May. His bloodstained car was found June 2 at Newark Airport in New Jersey. Gambino is the nephew of Carlo Gambino, identified by the Justice Department as leader of a New York organized crime family.